

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #3

Reporting period: 08/11/2023 to 14/11/2023

The ETC was activated for the conflict crisis in Gaza on 31 October 2023. Situation Reports are published weekly.

Highlights

- Humanitarian operations in Gaza are collapsing due to the lack of fuel. This includes the closure of all communications and internet connectivity services, which network providers will cut off as of 16 November once generators can no longer run.
- The ETC is engaging with the Egyptian Red Crescent—the sole consignee of goods going through the Rafah Border Crossing into Gaza—to gather more information on the approach to importation of equipment into Gaza through El Arish in Egypt.
- The cluster met with the Office of the Quartet based in Jerusalem, which is supporting ETC efforts by sharing the information on network operators collected from the Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications & Information Technology (MTIT). The information will strengthen advocacy on the need for fuel, safe access for network maintenance teams, and uninterrupted communications services for all.
- ETC urgently requires an initial US\$250,000 out of the total requested US\$800,000 in the Flash Appeal to continue ongoing activities in the Gaza response and to be ready for personnel to deploy. At this stage, the ETC has no funding for the response in Gaza and is operating on emergency reserves.



Humanitarian operations and communications infrastructure in Gaza are coming to a standstill due to the lack of fuel. Photo: UNRWA/Fadi El Tayyar

Situation overview

Armed conflict between Palestinian militant groups and Israeli military forces began on 07 October 2023. Since then, intense airstrikes and a complete siege in the Gaza Strip has resulted in a humanitarian crisis.

11 November marked one month since Gaza has been under an electricity blackout since the depletion of fuel reserves for Gaza's sole power plant. The entry of fuel—which is desperately needed to operate basic infrastructure—remains banned in the list of items allowed into Gaza.

As previously anticipated, humanitarian operations are collapsing in Gaza due to the lack of fuel. Back-to-back aid delivery operations at the Rafah Border Crossing with Egypt ceased on 14 November, preventing the only source of humanitarian items being delivered into Gaza. UNRWA sanitation work also started shutting down on 14 November. Public WASH facilities and the fleet system will stop on 15 November. All communications including internet will be gradually cut off from 16 November. The

collapse of humanitarian operations means that it will no longer be possible to deliver aid, including for the estimated 1.5 million displaced people.

Humanitarian agencies are preparing to ramp up preparedness actions in the West Bank as the conflict escalates.

Telecommunications overview

The shortages of electricity and fuel is bringing the humanitarian response in Gaza to a standstill. This includes the closure of all communications services.

The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (MTIT) in Palestine reports that the communications infrastructure in Gaza will no longer be operational as of 16 November due to the lack of fuel and the ongoing conflict.

The Paltel Group also reports that their data centres will start phasing out from 14 November and expects the whole network to be down by 16 November.

This total shutdown will leave humanitarian staff in Gaza unable to communicate, other than by equipment they may have such as satellite phones or BGAN connectivity terminals.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC coordinator is currently based in Cairo until the documents to travel to Jerusalem are finalized. The ETC Coordinator is convening the UN ICT Working Group and is participating in the National Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG).

The cluster compiled the results of the ICT capacity assessment conducted in early November alongside recognition of the rapidly unfolding situation in Gaza. The survey aimed to map the geographical and operational areas affected by the Gaza conflict to identify available services and assess the specific needs of its partners active in the region. The survey received responses from 23 individuals representing 21 organizations. The key findings of the survey confirmed the ETC response plan and initial services to be set up, considering the current situation in Gaza:

- **Communications channels:** Key channels used by organizations in Gaza are via Internet Service Providers (ISPs), mobile internet services, and telephone lines;
- **Staff presence:** Partners anticipate staff members to be based in common operational locations in Gaza City, Deir Al Balah, Khan Yunis, and Rafah;
- **Other operational locations:** Includes Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Jordan, where some ICT services are available;
- **Identified ICT needs:** Crucial for effective operations includes Security Communications Services (SCS); internet connectivity; telephony services; and dissemination of information to affected communities;
- **Common challenges:** Shared critical challenges faced by partners operating in the Gaza Strip includes problems accessing internet connectivity; issues with the reliability and performance of existing internet connectivity; non-operational or unreliable telephone networks in common operational hubs; a shortage of technical staff; and difficulty in procuring ICT equipment;
- **Shortage of fuel:** The lack of fuel in Gaza is a major issue in running generators and other key communications infrastructure.

On 14 November, the ETC met with the Office of the Quartet¹, which has collected all the information and needs of the network operators and sites from the Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications & Information Technology (MTIT). The Office of the Quartet is now supporting ETC efforts by sharing the information they have collected so far, which will strengthen advocacy on the need for fuel, safe access for network maintenance teams to the relevant sites, and uninterrupted communications services for all.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has relayed the criticality of the situation shared by the Palestinian MTIT to WFP, OCHA, and the office of the United Nations Secretary-General.

The ETC sent out a communication on 09 November to all ICT partners involved in the response to provide an update on the importation of equipment into Gaza and next steps on facilitating the process to establish a corridor for telecommunications equipment into Gaza. Although there is no guarantee that importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza will be quick or successful at this stage, a coordinated approach has a higher chance of success.

Importation of equipment

The ETC continues to work with partners to identify a corridor through which to import telecommunications equipment into Gaza and to facilitate access to transport routes and clearance processes, in line with the deteriorating situation on the ground.

The ETC engaged with the Egyptian Red Crescent² on 12 November to gather more information on the approach to importation of equipment into Gaza through El Arish, located in the Sinai Peninsula in north east Egypt. The feasibility of shipping equipment to El Arish for onward movement to Gaza in a convoy is being explored. Authorization will still be needed from the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) through OCHA for this pathway, as well as a basic agreement with the Egyptian authorities on the basis that this equipment would not be used or set up in Egypt. A focal point from the Egyptian Red Crescent is identified to facilitate the process.

The ETC met with OCHA on 13 November to follow up on the response from COGAT on if and which telecommunications equipment items can enter Gaza through Israel, following the submission of the equipment list on 01 November. The list has been updated according to prioritization of the equipment. The essential equipment included in the list is pre-packed and pre-configured for radio communications and satellite connectivity with solar power solutions to setup services that would be made available to all humanitarians in up to three locations in Gaza, tentatively identified as Kahn Yunis and two sites in Rafah. OCHA confirmed the discussion with COGAT is still ongoing.

The Government of Luxembourg is ready to provide VSAT equipment and free bandwidth services as part of the identified list of equipment submitted to OCHA, and Ericsson Response is ready to support with equipment if a second wave of equipment becomes possible. The services will be offered as in-kind donation.

The list of telecommunications equipment submitted to COGAT above for importation via Israel has also been submitted to the Egyptian authorities for consideration and fast tracked importation via Egypt. WFP is supporting this engagement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). The ETC awaits a response.

The ETC is diversifying its satellite connectivity options to ensure that a solution reaches Gaza in the case that some equipment is not granted authorization to be used there.

¹ The Office of the Quartet was established in East Jerusalem in 2002 by the Quartet on the Middle East: <https://www.quartetoffice.org/>

² Egyptian Red Crescent are the sole consignees of goods going into Gaza from El Arish.

Access to information

Alternative communications channels are needed to disseminate humanitarian messages to the population in Gaza. A group for community/FM radio is conducting a rapid assessment on which radio stations are operational and listened to. At least five FM radio stations are working. An initial indication from the assessment shows that 1 in 6 people in Gaza are listening to radio. A BBC World News Arabic service has started broadcasting on Friday evenings from their transmitter in Cyprus, aimed at the population in Gaza.

Staffing

The ETC Coordinator is based in Cairo. The Coordinator awaits the visa to travel to Jerusalem, which will be crucial to engage with local actors.

An ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) has been identified to be deployed to Cairo on 21 November and will be based with the ETC Coordinator there.

The ETC is working on the required profiles needed for the operation, some of which are applying for visas to be placed on standby for deployment, depending on how the situation on the ground evolves.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of planned service locations.

Funding

The ETC requires an initial US\$250,000 out of the total requested US\$800,000 in the Flash Appeal to continue ongoing activities and to be ready for personnel to deploy. At this stage, the ETC has no funding for the response in Gaza and is operating on emergency reserves. Funding is urgently needed to enable the ETC to operate efficiently and to address the immediate needs on the ground. The ETC is exploring funding options from multiple sources.

The [updated Flash Appeal](#) released on 06 November is requesting US\$1.2 billion to meet the needs of the entire population of Gaza and 500,000 people in the West Bank.

Challenges

The shortages of electricity and fuel is bringing the humanitarian response in Gaza to a standstill. This includes the closure of all communications services including internet, which are being cut off as of 16 November. Even before this phase-out, telecommunications networks were unreliable and sometimes unavailable.

Airstrikes and movement restrictions also continue to pose a challenge to humanitarian staff.

The Rafah Border crossing between Egypt and Gaza was the only point open to deliver humanitarian relief items which were limited to four life-saving categories: food, water, shelter, and medicine. These cross-border operations are now phasing out due to the lack of fuel.

Importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is extremely challenging. Further challenges will now be in place following the closure of humanitarian operations for the delivery of aid via the Rafah Border Crossing.

All items going into Gaza need to be approved by the Israeli authorities. Any items brought in via Egypt also needs to have importation permits from the Egyptian authorities and agreement with the Egyptian Red Crescent, which are the sole consignee of goods for the Rafah Border Crossing.

The Kerem Shalom border crossing remains closed since the start of the conflict. Even before the current crisis, ICT equipment importation via this route took 4-5 months.

The reach of operations will remain limited without a ceasefire, safe access, and significant funding for the humanitarian response.

The risk of cybersecurity issues in this emergency is considered high.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **15 November at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on **09 November**. All minutes are uploaded [here](#).

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www.etcluster.org/emergency/palestine-conflict

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